

(U) Ask Zelda!: The Perils of Pauline

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

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(U) The below column is unclassified in its entirety.



Dear Zelda,

I was wondering what you would suggest for the following situation: I had a co-worker in a previous office who used to greet me everyday with a list of reminders of things she needed me to do. Throughout the day, she would continue to remind me, as though I had forgotten and I needed to do things on her schedule. She also frequently had snide comments regarding my work, and would complain at least once a day about everything that was wrong with our organization. This was particularly bad, in my opinion, because she wasn't setting a very good example for our junior analysts. Frankly, I wasn't sure how to deal with her at the time.

Put-upon Pauline

Dear PUP,

It sounds like you solved your own problem by switching jobs. But for the sake of the person who replaced you, I will tell you what I think you should have done.

There are two issues at work here:

- your co-worker's bossy behavior toward you and
- her complaining about the organization, which is setting a poor example for junior analysts.

Miss Bossy Pants

My first question is, why are you taking orders from a co-worker who is not your supervisor? Next time she greets you with a "to do" list, refer her to your team or branch chief. He should be the one assigning the work, not her.

In general, if people other than your boss task you to do things for them -- whether within or outside of your immediate organization -- I suggest the following:

- Go to your supervisor and tell him that Miss Bossy Pants (don't use that expression) just gave you this list of things she wants you to do by [insert her deadline].
- Let him know what other things you're currently working on.

- Ask him to prioritize your work so you know which things to tackle first.

He may look at the list and assign some or all of it to someone else. Or he may decide Bossy Pants needs to do her own work. He may even have a talk with her to encourage her to come to him with her list of needs, rather than assign things to her co-workers, so he can retain control over the organization's work load. In any case, the above steps will help manage his expectations about your other deadlines and keep him in the loop.

Negative Nelly

If your co-worker's attitude is poisoning the work environment for newer employees, have a private talk with her and tell her so. (Tactfully.) She may just think she's letting off steam and not realize the impact it's having on others. If her behavior doesn't improve, you can bring your concerns to your work center supervisor. See this **previous Zelda column** for more advice on the subject.

My dear Pauline, there is no need for you to feel like a helpless damsel in distress. Take charge of the situation and involve your supervisor, when necessary. By following the above recommendations, you should easily be able to neutralize this Negative Nelly Bossy-Pants.

Zelda
